



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Fighting Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

As prepared for delivery by Mr. Kamal Nawash
to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism
and on Other Forms of Intolerance
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My name is Kamal Nawash and as the president of the Free Muslim Coalition Against Terrorism, I am here representing the United States of America and more than six million American Muslims who are proud to call the United States home.

Like many Muslims around the world, American Muslims watched in horror as criminals attacked our beloved country on September 11, 2001. American Muslims were disgusted to learn that one of the worst crimes in the history of the United States was committed by criminals who claimed that their actions were somehow justified by the Muslim faith.

On 9-11, American Muslims felt enormous grief and sadness for having to witness a symbol of our nation's freedom and strength being destroyed by a fire that was set by criminals who claimed to be Muslims. Most American Muslims vowed never to forget that day and the sight of innocent people jumping from two of the tallest buildings in the world hoping against hope that they might survive a certain death from burning.

In addition to the enormous sadness we felt on 9-11, American Muslims also felt anxiety and apprehension at the thought that non-Muslim Americans may blame us for that horrible crime. Our sadness quickly turned into fear of possible "retaliation" against innocent Muslims -- who, in fact, condemned the actions of the terrorists.

However, American Muslims quickly learned that our fear and apprehension were exaggerated. Immediately after 9-11, President George Bush took time from managing the worst crisis that any president can experience and visited a mosque to remind American Muslims and non-Muslims alike that we are all Americans. This demonstrated that even a tragedy like 9-11 will not shake the foundation on which America was founded. That foundation was built on religious freedom, tolerance, justice and a sense of fairness that is found in far too few places of the world. For those American Muslims who still felt fear and anxiety our government reached out to them again by inviting an Imam to speak at a memorial for the victims of 9-11. Since then, President Bush has not passed up an opportunity to remind all Americans that Islam is both a great religion and a religion of peace.

The proactive leadership of our government in reminding all Americans that Muslims are neither to be targeted nor blamed for the crimes of a few deranged criminals was very successful and influenced a nation during a time of grief. Immediately after 9-11, Americans of all backgrounds began reaching out to their Muslim neighbors by inviting them to churches and town hall meetings. Many non-Muslim women even went as far as wearing a

head scarf to show solidarity with American Muslim women and to remind all Americans to not cast blame on the innocent.

The type of leadership exercised by the U.S. government immediately after 9-11 is a good example of how government action can foster tolerance and respect for all people even under the most difficult of circumstances. Unfortunately, some American Muslims did suffer attacks and discrimination as a result of 9-11. Even our government made some mistakes, but most of those were later corrected. The point here is that the discrimination and other difficulties faced by American Muslims were minimized by President Bush's and the U.S. government's swift and intelligent actions to pre-empt and combat a potential backlash against the American Muslim community.

As a consequence of our Government's outreach to the American Muslim community after 9-11, many American Muslims today feel more American than they ever felt before. American Muslims showed their appreciation and devotion to the United States by joining our military, joining various law enforcement agencies, establishing non-governmental organizations and doing all they could to make certain that the 9-11 terrorist acts would never be repeated again on U.S. soil. In fact, the founding of the Free Muslim Coalition Against Terrorism was a direct consequence of the 9-11 attacks. Our goal is to defeat and discredit the ideology that leads to extremism and support for terrorism.

Moreover, U.S. government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice have continuously reached out to American Muslims in order to build mutual understanding and fight intolerance against Muslims. American Muslim organizations have also initiated programs to assist our government. For example, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy and the Muslim Public Affairs Committee have initiated projects to reach out to and work with American mosques to discredit intolerant and extremist rhetoric from within our community. These initiatives have substantially reduced intolerance against American Muslims and significantly assisted the U.S. Government in developing a mutually beneficial working relationship with American Muslims.

Unfortunately, the 9-11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror did not end the use of terror and mass murder in the name of Islam. Following 9-11, the world again witnessed mass murder of hundreds of train passengers here in Spain and other, smaller terrorist attacks. I am certain these evil acts caused many in Spain and throughout Europe and the OSCE region to be suspicious of their Muslim compatriots. While it may be human nature to react to crimes or tragic events by punishing those who are perceived to be members of the group who committed terrorist acts, it is always wrong to blame an entire group for the actions of individual criminals. It is also counter productive. The OSCE and participating States must continue to combat any retribution or discrimination stemming from such instances.

The war against terrorism and in particular terrorism committed by Muslims is an ideological battle that cannot be won without the help of Muslims themselves. American Muslims are playing a crucial role in fighting the ideology that leads to terror. We urge European and Eurasian Muslims to join in that cause. If European governments are not proactive in eliminating bias and discrimination against European Muslims, the European Muslim community will become marginalized. Rather than focus their energy on helping Europe fight terror and intolerance, they will instead withdraw from society and Europe may lose an essential element in the war on terror. Moreover, the marginalization of European Muslims

through bans on religious expression will substantially slow or even bring to a halt the process of integrating European Muslims into the fabric of Europe. For these reasons, we ask the OSCE and its participating States to do all they can to distinguish between the criminals who justify evil in the name of Islam and Muslims who want nothing more than to provide for their families and raise their children to be productive citizens. The OSCE and its member states must continue to play their vital role in promoting tolerance of Muslims and combating discrimination and abuses of Muslims.

Thank you.